

EFEE Statement on the “EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2021-2027)”

Brussels, 4 May 2021

Ensuring the creation of a decent, healthy and safe working environment is the basis of any meaningful sectoral social dialogue. While great strides have already been made both at national and EU level to improve the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) measures, there still remain significant discrepancies between the theoretical guidelines and the practical implementation. In light of the green and digital transition as well as the current pandemic, we therefore deem it crucial that a new “EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2021-2027)” is set up, which reflects the current situation as well as the lessons learned from the previous “EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2014-2020)”.

As a European sectoral social partner in education and representative of 60 European education employers and formal education providers at levels of education from 26 countries, the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) welcomes the “EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2021-2027)”. Against this background, we would like to raise awareness on the following outstanding issues related to OSH as well as shine a light on the many lessons and potential opportunities that should be taken into account when developing a new Strategic Framework.

Having this in mind, EFEE calls upon the European Commission to consider the following points:

1. Ensure that the Strategic Framework has a mainstreamed message with clear objectives, actions and deliverables. We deem it crucial that the new Strategic Framework retains a broad perspective on OSH in order to encompass not only all sectors but also respect the subsidiarity of this competence. Against this background, EFEE strongly supports the six potential building blocks identified by the Commission: (1) Anticipating and managing change in the context of the green and digital transitions; (2) Preventing work-related diseases and accidents; (3) Increasing preparedness; (4) Improving application and enforcement; (5) Ensuring evidence-based policy; (6) Promoting higher OSH standards in the world.
2. In light of the twin transitions and other mass trends, including the ageing workforce, we deem it crucial for the Strategic Framework to create synergies and build upon already existing legislation, such as the Green Paper on Ageing. While it is imperative to address the new risks resulting from innovative technologies, digitalisation, and other mass trends, it would be remiss to refrain from underlining the many

opportunities for OSH that these transitions provide. We therefore invite the Commission to present a more balanced approach in the Strategic Framework in order to portray a more accurate view of the impact of these changes on many sectors, including the education sector.

3. We deem it vital to underline that while the preceding mass trends require new risks to be addressed, it is equally important to continuously update the Strategic Framework with regards to the traditional risks. In this light, psychosocial and ergonomic risks on the one hand and wellbeing at work on the other hand should be addressed properly in the new Strategic Framework. Nevertheless, we also emphasize that a comprehensive legislative package on different OSH-related issues is already in place today and that the focus should therefore first and foremost remain on the implementation of these existing frameworks rather than on developing new legislation. While we therefore fully welcome any update on the existing frameworks, we deem it crucial to note that modernisation should be promoted when necessary, and not just for the sake of modernisation.
4. The Covid-19 pandemic has showcased that keeping all workers, but specifically those in certain services of general interest such as the healthcare and education sectors, healthy and safe should be a public priority of all Member States. We therefore warmly welcome the Commission's commitment to better preparing both employers and employees for future global pandemics or other public health crises, which could threaten their safety and wellbeing inside the workplace. Nevertheless, we stress that some impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic, including mandatory telework, cannot be viewed as permanent and can therefore also not be regarded by the new Strategic Framework as such. We therefore call for specific actions within this new Strategic Framework that reflect the normal working situation, taking into consideration the important lessons learned from the current crisis.
5. As this new Strategic Framework should build upon the lessons learned from the previous policy initiatives, we would like to emphasize that the implementation and enforcement of the existing legislation should remain the key priority. In this regard, we would furthermore like to stress that including the sectoral social partners both at EU and national level in this process will be a crucial element in achieving this objective. Having this in mind, we encourage the Commission to not only promote the sectoral social partners' pivotal role in the implementation and adaptation of existing legislation at national and sectoral level but also facilitate the sharing of best practices across Member States. Moreover, the two preceding building blocks of prevention and preparedness can only be fully realized through a close involvement of the sectoral social partners at all levels. In particular, we call for the Commission and the Member

States to ensure more sectoral training with regards to OSH, which includes the various sector-specific risks and challenges. Lastly, we highlight that the implementation of the social partners' Autonomous Agreements, including the most recent Autonomous Agreement on Digitalisation, at the national level remains a key aspect in achieving the objectives set out by the Strategic Frameworks.

6. Lastly, we stress that ensuring an evidence-based approach to OSH as well as promoting higher OSH standards in the world can only be achieved by fostering effective and efficient social dialogue both at the EU and national level. Through the facilitation of best practice sharing and efficient flow of information, concrete and valid evidence samples can be built. In this regard, it is furthermore crucial that social partners, and specifically employers, are not unnecessarily overburdened by cumbersome administrative requirements. Taking this into consideration, we refer back to our initial proposal to develop a general framework, which leaves sufficient space for national and sectoral adaptation as opposed to regulations on specific topics.



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